Letters: Celia’s Character Progression

It seems that Celia is long lost in love with a stranger. At least, that is what Celia’s letters connote. Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban*, a novel about a dysfunctional Cuban family, demonstrates that political views can affect family health, but perhaps more important is Celia, a main character that is in a love triangle and struggles between her past and present through her love letters. She struggles because she starts to want Gustavo, an old lover, while she is in a relationship with Jorge, the new lover. With regards to Celia’s letters, they are shown by Garcia as a tool for Celia to express her love for Gustavo; however, analyzing the letters reveals that they play an important role in *Dreaming in Cuban* because the letters reveal Celia’s transition from a nostalgic lover to a loving grandmother. Celia becomes a loving grandmother because she starts to love her granddaughter, Pilar.

Celia’s characteristic is revealed through her love letters because she wants to go back to the past to be with Gustavo. Celia is developing her relationship with Jorge, but she writes a letter to Gustavo: “I’ve told [Jorge] about you, about our meetings in the Hotel Inglaterra. He tells me to forget you. Yours forever, Celia” (Garcia 49). Celia’s trait is revealed because when she is spending time with Jorge, she wants to be with Gustavo in the past. As a result, Celia pushes Jorge away and keeps Gustavo close to her. In addition, Jorge tries to take Celia away from her nostalgia by telling her to forget about Gustavo; however, Celia ignores Jorge’s efforts
and vows to always stay with Gustavo. Therefore, Celia is happier in the past than the present because of her desires to be with Gustavo.

Although the letters connote to readers that Celia does not want to leave her past, the letters show her diminishing nostalgic characteristic. In the novel, Jorge is hospitalized and Celia is by his side. As a result, Celia writes to Gustavo, “I’m sorry I didn’t write to you […] but Jorge was in a terrible car accident […] I cried when I saw him bandaged in white […] I discovered I love him at that moment” (Garcia 54). Celia grows from her apology letter because she realizes that Jorge is the man in her life. In addition, Celia claims that she was crying when she saw Jorge which shows that she loves him. Celia starts to slowly progress away from her nostalgia because she starts to accept Jorge. As a result, Celia’s acknowledgement of her feelings causes her to reconsider her love for Gustavo. She writes, “I still love you, Gustavo, but it’s a habitual love, a wound in the knee […] I write to you because I must” (Garcia 97). Celia claims that her feelings for Gustavo are no longer the same which shows that she is starting to forget about their relationship and past. In addition, her desire for Gustavo has dwindled down to just a habit instead of an obsession because she claims that he is just a wound that has left a mark on her. Even though Celia begins to slowly let go of her past relationship, she claims that she cannot fully forget about Gustavo because she believes he is a necessity in her life. Although Celia has flashbacks in time, she is progressing away from her characteristic of wanting to live in the past because she starts to admit her true feelings for Gustavo.

Even though the letters preserve Celia’s past lover, they help her realize that she no longer needs to love Gustavo because she accepts that they can never be together. In 1942 Celia writes to Gustavo about the destruction of the country (Garcia 97). She claims that the country is going to war and that death is undeniable; however, she starts to think about herself. Celia
writes, “I asked myself once, ‘what is the nature of obsession?’ But I no longer question it. I accept it the way I accept my husband and my daughters and my life […] I’ve begun teaching myself French” (Garcia 97). Celia begins to realize that she does not need the past anymore because she is happy with her family and husband. Furthermore, she claims that her current life is all she wants because she is satisfied with it. Moving on, Celia begins to learn French which means that she is starting to live her life. As a result, Celia is at the stage of her life in which she is ready to overcome her nostalgic self because she is preparing for her present and future life.

Celia overcomes her nostalgia and grows, as her last letter shows her resolve to leave the past behind. As the letter comes to an end, Celia ends her love for Gustavo and discovers a new kind of love that is stronger than her love for Gustavo. Garcia writes, “Celia’s Letter: 1959. My dearest Gustavo, My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. It is also my birthday. I am fifty years old. I will no longer write to you, mi amor. She will remember everything. My love always, Celia” (Garcia 245). In this last letter, Celia writes about her birthday to reveal that after seventeen years of wanting Gustavo, she accepts him as a past memory. Because Celia is ready to give up remembering her past, she tells Gustavo that she has found a new love: her granddaughter, Pilar. Celia finalizes her development by promising that this is her last letter and that she is giving all the love letters to her granddaughter. As a result, Celia progresses away from nostalgia to a grandmother because of her decision to love Pilar.

Cristina Garcia incorporates love letters into her novel to reveal the importance of having a loved one. The letters represent the hardship of having a loved one that disappears. Furthermore, Garcia sends the message that people will always have someone they love and cherish even if they are in love with someone else, especially if they have spent a vast majority of time together. This message affects readers because Garcia wants people to understand that
love will always be available and there should not be any reason to shut themselves away from it, despite their previous experiences. Celia’s last letter connotes that in modern society; people should always look forward in life and concentrate on their future because every day a new experience is waiting.

Work Cited